

History 219: The American Jewish Experience: From *Shtetl* to Suburb

University of Wisconsin, Madison
Fall 2012
M-W-F 12:05-12:55 (Humanities 1111)

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Course Description

A century and a half ago, the United States was a backwater of the Jewish world, then centered in Europe and the Ottoman Turkish Empire. Yet, by the 1950s, the United States became home to the largest, most prosperous, and most secure Jewish community in modern history. Why did millions of Jews come to the United States? How has life in a liberal political and capitalist economic order shaped the Jewish experience in America? In turn, how have Jews influenced American culture, politics, and society? This course surveys the history of American Jews from the 18th century to the 21st century. Topics include patterns of politics, social mobility, Jewish culture in Yiddish and English, inter-ethnic group relations, gender and sexuality, religion, and problems in community building. The course combines lectures, in-class discussions, film, and audio recordings. Readings consist of secondary and primary sources.

Books

Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2006)

Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2005)

Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (Yale Univ. Press, 2004)

Michael Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (Columbia Univ. Press, 2002)

All assigned books are on reserve at College Library. They are also available for purchase at the Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative located at 426 W. Gilman.

The required course packet is available for purchase at the Copy Center on the first floor of the Humanities Building.

= scholarly articles in course packet

* = primary documents in course packet

Course Requirements

You are required to attend lectures and discussion sections. Failure to participate actively in the discussions will result in a failing grade for participation (see below). The assigned reading should be completed in time for your discussion section. (Your TAs may give you brief assignments for sections.) Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course and disciplinary action. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please consult with the teaching assistant or me. Finally, computers or any other electronic devices are *not* permitted during lectures and discussions.

An in-class midterm exam, one six-page take-home assignment, and a final exam are required.

Participation and attendance: 20%

Midterm exam (Oct. 12): 25%

Take-home assignment (Nov. 12): 25%

Final exam (Dec. 20): 30%

The Kutler Lectures

The Center for Jewish Studies' annual Kutler Lectures will take place on November 12 and 13. Attendance at both lectures is a requirement. This year's speaker is Prof. Beth Wenger (Univ. of Pennsylvania). Prof. Wenger will speak on the following topics.

Nov. 12 (7:00 p.m., location TBA): "Civic Lessons: Jews and American National Holidays."

Nov. 13 (4:00 p.m., location TBA): "The Making of American Jewish Men: The Construction of Jewish Masculinities in American Culture."

Lectures and Reading

Week 1 (Sept. 5-7): Introduction

Week 2 (Sept. 10-14): Becoming Citizens: Jews in Colonial and Early America

Jonathan Sarna, American Judaism: A History, pp. xiii-61.

Course Packet:

*Article VI and the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America (1789).

Week 3 (Sept. 17-21): The Rise of American Jewry

Note: class canceled for Rosh Hashanah on Sept. 17.

Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 62-207.

Course Packet:

*Conference of Reform Rabbis, "The Pittsburgh Platform" (1885).

*Solomon Schechter, "Catholic Israel" (1896).

*The Orthodox Jewish Congregational Union of America (1898).

Week 4 (Sept. 24-28): The Great Eastern European Migration

Eric Goldstein, The Price of Whiteness, pp. 1-115.

Course Packet:

*Michael Gold, Jews Without Money (1930), pp. 357-362.

Week 5 (Sept. 24-28): Labor and Protest

Note: class canceled on Sept. 26 for Yom Kippur.

Tony Michels, A Fire in Their Hearts, pp. 1-124.

Course Packet:

**Di nyu-yorker yidishe folkstsaytung*, "Strong, Firm, and Correct Propaganda" (1886).

*Bernard Vaynshteyn, "The Birth of the Knee-Pants Makers' Union" (1924).

*Alexander Berkman, "The Attempted Assassination of Henry Clay Frick" (1912).

*Rose Pastor Stokes, "The Right to Control Birth" (1916).

Week 6 (Oct. 1-5): The Yiddish Cultural Renaissance

Michels, A Fire in Their Hearts, pp. 125-216.

Course Packet:

*Chaim Zhitlovsky, "Our Future in America" (1915).

*B. Sheyfer, "A Language that He Wants To and Must Forget" (1918).

Week 7 (Oct. 8-12): At Home in America?

(Note: *midterm exam on Oct. 12*)

Eric Goldstein, The Price of Whiteness, pp. 119-186.

Course Packet:

#Jonathan Pollack, "Jewish Problems: Eastern and Western Jewish Identities in Conflict at the University of Wisconsin, 1919-1941," American Jewish History (June 2001): 161-180.

*Henry Ford, "The International Jew: The World's Problem" (1920).

Week 8 (Oct. 15-19): Judaism Reconstructed

Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 208-271.

Course Packet:

*Mordecai Kaplan, "The Reconstruction of Judaism" (1920).

*Ludwig Lewisohn, "The Fallacies of Assimilation" (1925).

Week 9 (Oct. 22-26): Jews in American Popular Culture

Course Packet:

#Michael Alexander, Jazz Age Jews (Princeton Univ. Press, 2001), pp. 133-179.

Michael Rogin, "Black Sacrifice, Jewish Redemption," in African Americans and Jews in the Twentieth Century, eds. V. P. Franklin, et. al. (Univ. of Missouri Press, 1998), pp. 87-101.

*Samson Raphaelson, "How I Came to Write 'The Jazz Singer'" (1927).

Week 10 (Oct. 29-Nov. 2): The "Red Decade"

Course Packet:

#Howard Sachar, "The Era of the Great Depression," A History of the Jews in America (Vintage, 1992), pp. 428-464.

#Beth S. Wenger, New York Jews and the Great Depression (Yale Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 103-135.

*Irving Howe, "A Memoir of the Thirties" (1961), pp. 349-364.

Week 11 (Nov. 5-9): World War II, the Holocaust, and the State of Israel

Goldstein, The Price of Whiteness, pp. 187-208.

Course Packet:

#Aaron Berman, Nazism, the Jews and American Zionism, 1933-1948 (Wayne State Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 96-184.

*Central Conference of American Rabbis, "The Columbus Platform" (1937).

*American Council for Judaism, "Statement of Policy" (1944).

Week 12 (Nov. 12-16): Contentment and Its Costs: Jews in Post-War America

(Note: The Kutler Lectures take place on Nov. 12 and 13. As explained in the Course Requirements section, attendance is mandatory.)

(Also note: take-home assignment due on Nov. 12)

Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 272-306.

Course Packet:

#Riv-Ellen Prell, Fighting to Become Americans: Jews, Gender, and the Anxiety of Assimilation, (Beacon Press, 1999), pp. 142-208.

*Arlene Peck, "Coming of Age in the South: The Southern Jewish American Princess in the Fabulous Fifties" in The Ethnic American Woman, ed. Edith Blinksilver (1978).

Week 13 (Nov. 19): Communal Consensus and Conflict

(Note: class canceled on Nov. 21 and 23 for Thanksgiving)

Michael Staub, Torn at the Roots, pp. 1-111,

Week 14 (Nov. 26-Nov. 30): Communal Consensus and Conflict, cont.

Staub, Torn at the Roots, pp. 112-279,

Course Packet:

*"Negro-Jewish Relations in America: A Symposium" (1966).

*"Aviva Cantor Zuckoff, "Oppression of America's Jews" (1971).

*"Ezrat Nashim: Jewish Women Call for Change" (1972).

Week 15: (Dec. 3-7): Jews in American Popular Culture (act 2)

Course Packet:

#David Zurawick, The Jews of Prime Time (Brandeis Univ. Press, 2003), pp. 78-139.

*Lenny Bruce, "Jewish and Goyish" (c. 1960).

*Philip Roth, "Shiksas and Other Goyim" (from the novel *Portnoy's Complaint*, 1967).

Week 16 (Dec. 10-14): Assimilation or Renewal?

Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 306-374.

Goldstein, The Price of Whiteness, pp. 209-239.

Final Exam: Dec. 20 @ 7:45-9:45 a.m.